

# THE CENTURY TURNS

by the Sherborn Historical Society  
regarding life around 1900

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## INTRODUCTION

So many times you hear people say: "If only I could remember what my grandfather told me about that house," but with the passing of each old person, there goes the loss of information about people and places that we can never bring back. It is with this in mind, then, that the Sherborn Historical Society is getting out this little book, to preserve the memories of older people. It is not so much an attempt to record exact historical events, as to paint a picture of the people who lived in Sherborn at the turn of the Century . . . how they lived, what they thought about, and how they enjoyed themselves.

—O—O—

*Sept 92 Gift*

The Sherborn Historical Society wishes to thank everyone who contributed to this book: Mrs. Harvey Auringer, Mrs. C. Arthur Dowse, Mrs. George C. Mayer, Mr. Arthur Hawes, Mr. H. Nat. Dowse and others for their contributions.

Sherborn, Massachusetts  
1966

## CHAPTER I

## The Times

If a homemaker of today could, by some magic, step back into a home of 1900, the first thing she might notice would be the silence. There would be no noise of a dishwasher or washing machine, no sound of the motor in the refrigerator or oil burner, no vacuum cleaner or electric beater. There would be no radio or television or jangling telephone bell. Only the occasional clop-clopping of a horse and the rattle of a wagon would be heard from the street, not the roar of heavy trucks and a stream of automobiles. She would be glad when the children came home from school, just because they brought sound with them.

Nearly all heating and cooking was done with coal or wood. Many people used coal in the winter and wood in the summer. Water was heated in a tank built into the back of the stove, or by a "water front" which consisted of pipes built into the firebox of the cookstove. The latter was especially satisfactory when used with a coal fire, as hot water was on tap at all times. Coal kept a steady fire and its great advantage, especially in winter, was that it would keep all night. Wood was another good means of cooking as a hot fire could be prepared in a short time and then it could be cooled down fairly quickly.

Hot air furnaces were good if you had a woodlot with large pieces of wood that you could not sell as cordwood or lumber. These large pieces could be put into the furnace and would burn a long time. The churches were heated this way until quite recently. "Air tight" stoves were very popular for bedrooms. These were small sheet iron stoves that burned wood and heated up very quickly. Kerosene was used some for both cooking and heating, but the burners had not been perfected at the turn of the century to make them as cheap or as satisfactory as the other methods.

Steam and hot water heat were coming into use, but were still not very common. The parlor stove was still king. Indeed, some people had to entertain the Whist Club early in the season before the parlor stove was set up as there was not enough room in the front room for both the stove and the card tables.

Do not feel too sorry for the woman who cooked with these more or less primitive methods. With a little skill, a wood fire is very satisfactory, and a warm kitchen for raising bread was helpful. Of course, you had to stay at home to stoke the fire and open and shut the drafts, but women stayed at home then, anyway. The grocer came and took orders several times a week, and then delivered. Traffic was such that it was safe for children to be on the streets so mothers did not have to run a taxi service. Many winters, there was dancing school in Unity Hall, and there were piano teachers in town, too. Public school teachers were mostly local girls whom you knew, so you did not have to go to school to straighten out things continually. Women did not

have to live half their lives in a car. In fact, until self starters were invented, they did not drive at all.

It should also be noted here that a good general maid was usually available at \$3.00 or \$3.50 a week, who would do all the work, including washing the clothes and taking care of the baby. However, this was a high price to pay if a man did not get but a dollar a day.

Many people had a pump in the kitchen sink (and many of these pumps were made in East Holliston) or perhaps a pump in the back yard, and the water was brought into the house in pails. The necessity of carrying wood and water was a great deterrent to juvenile delinquency, and of course boys did not require a driving license. There were no cars in town in 1900.

A few houses, the Paul house on Main Street, and a house that stood at the end of Rockwood Street, had water from a spring high on the hill above, that flowed by gravity into the house. Others, who had a well near the house, had a force pump (a hand pump) that forced water into a large tank in the attic from which it flowed to different parts of the house. A family got to know exactly how many strokes must be pumped to replenish the tank after washing the dishes or taking a bath.

Another common source of water was the cistern in the cellar. Water from the eaves was piped into it and the beauty of it was that the water was very soft and was much better than the hard water from wells, especially for washing. Another advantage was that a small shower would help fill the cistern in a dry summer. Water from a slate roof was considered better than that from a shingled roof as there were no bits of rotted wood in it.

Kerosene lamps were in almost universal use for lighting. A few houses had acetylene plants. These acetylene plants contained a chemical, which, when water was added to it, produced a gas which burned very brightly. When the Dana Holbrook House (Main Street) was built, an acetylene plant was installed and it was piped for gas. But the gas was never used. When electricity came to town, in 1911, they used some of the gas pipes to run the wires in. Kerosene lamps gave poor light, smelled to high heaven and gave out a great deal of heat. They were hard to clean and it had to be done every day.

Of course, with no electricity, there were no appliances such as we have today. For toasting, you had the kitchen fire. Coal toasted best, but wood could be used. You ironed with old-fashioned irons or with sad-irons that had one wooden handle for three irons. In either case the irons had to be heated on the stove. Things boiled over on them and made them dirty. They cooled quickly and it took many trips across the kitchen to change irons. They were always too cool for sheets and too hot for ruffles. Of all the home improvements in the past half century nothing can compare with the improvement in ironing.

Without the vacuum cleaner, you had to sweep with a broom. This kicked up a lot of dust and you had to dust again after you had swept. Many people whose bedrooms were not heated did not sweep in the winter. When spring came, they took up the carpets and put them out on the line and beat them. Spring cleaning really meant something then.



Young people sometimes ask "What did you do without television, radio and movies?" The answer is that people entertained themselves instead of sitting back and being entertained. A popular song gives a hint as to what children did to amuse themselves.

I don't want to play in your yard.  
I don't like you any more,  
You'll be sorry when you see me  
Sliding down our cellar door.  
You shan't holler down my rain barrel  
You shan't climb my apple tree.  
I don't want to play in your yard  
If you won't be good to me.

The Minstrel Show was a very popular form of entertainment at this time, both as a professional and as an amateur show. Many songs were written especially for these Minstrel Shows. The all-time favorite "Dixie" is one. Others such as "De Blue Tail Fly", "Old Dan Tucker", "Nigger on de Wood Pile", and "Loozyanna Low Grounds" were originally written for Minstrel Shows. One very popular troupe was called Lew Dockstader's Minstrels.

Music-making played a major role in the entertainment of the era. From time to time, different bands and orchestras flourished in town.

Mr. and Mrs. Ames were a musical couple. They had come originally from Vermont where Mr. Ames was an organ builder and his wife played the organ. Although an old lady, she was still playing the church organ, at times, after the turn of the century even though she could not see well enough to read music. She had enough musical selections in her head to play for prelude, etc. and as for hymns some one in the choir just had to tell her the name of the hymn, what key it was in and how many verses. Of course, they could not sing anthems as she could not read the music. She was so tiny that you would think she would fall off the bench when reaching for the pedals, but she could play!

Mary Flagg played the organ at the Unitarian Church for a while. She was all right except that she did not know many selections. At that time, the "Ladies Home Journal" published one page of sheet music in every issue. Mary welcomed these new pieces, and if they were marches, it was all right. (Some of Sousa's marches came out in this magazine.) But when she played a waltz during the collection, Freeman Leland, who took up the collection, had difficulty making his feet behave. I think that this may have had some bearing on Mrs. Leland's suggestion of not having a collection. For many years, people who wished to contribute each week did so by putting their money into little boxes at the back of the Church. Others sent a check to the Treasurer.

Arthur Hawes and Edith Jackson (later Macfarland), who were school children at the turn of the century, also played the Church organs. Mrs. Miller taught several generations of children to play the piano.

Choir rehearsals often became very heated. There was no one at the head of the choir so everyone tried to tell everyone else how to sing. One evening, Mr. Fred Cushing, who lived with his sister Belle on Maple Street, opposite the end of Pleasant, took his sister to visit with her friends, the Everetts, while

he was at choir rehearsal. That night things proved more fiery than ever and Mr. Cushing became so angry that he put on his hat, walked out and drove home. It was not until after he had unharnessed the horse that he remembered his sister and had to harness the horse again and go back for her.

Then, as now, Baseball was extremely popular. Although then it was considered great fun to play ball, instead of going to a game to watch others play. There was an athletic association composed of young men in their late teens and early twenties and they met in a room over George Clark's store. (Clark's store was where the Soldier's Monument now stands.) Among the members of the team were Edward (Chick) Newman, Theodore (Gramp) Newman, Harold (Tubby) Auringer, Tom West, Nat Dowse, Floyd Dowse, Henry Bothfeld, Jim Farricy, Gene Rollins, Joe Dufour, Dudley Clark and Bill Lane.

Social, racial and religious differences played no part in choosing the team, the only question was "Can you play ball?" Sometimes the town team played against out-of-town teams but more often against an older group in town known as the "Old Timers." This team had a pitcher and a catcher from South Natick—Otto Schneider and Joe Wignot. Among the Sherborn men on this team were Tim Collins, Elijah and Albert Barber, Jack Burke, Irving Holbrook and Mike Fitzgerald.

Games were played at Campbell's Field on South Main Street south of Goulding Street. After the town acquired the present ball field the games were played there.

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In the center of town, between where the library and the War Memorial now stands was a long, low building which housed Clark's Dry Goods Store, George Sanger's Grocery Store and the Post Office.

Bailey's Express from South Natick did much business in Sherborn. In both the stores there were boxes in which orders might be placed if you had packages to send. Several times a week, a driver would go through, pick up the orders, collect the goods and send them to Boston. The small shoe manufacturing shops in town at that time made much business for the Expressmen. Automation had already raised its ugly head, but had not been named at that time. The small shoe shops made work for many men, especially in winter. But with the invention of the United Shoe Machinery Company's large machines, the small shops had to go out of business.

There were many men who knew specialties. One who comes to mind was a cooper. He was about sixty years old when they began using machines to do what he had shaped by hand and he was a little too old to start learning a new trade. The difference between people then and now is that people then were more resigned to their fate, and tightened their belts a little and "made do."

In 1900, there were two blacksmith shops in town, one on the north side of Railroad Avenue (Powderhouse Lane) and the other on Main Street just south of where Washington Street turns off. While horse shoeing was their main business, they also put new iron tires on farm wagons and pleasure car-



riages and mended farm tools. A blacksmith shop was a fascinating place for a child and the smiths were generally very good about having children around. The big bellows, the forge, the anvil,—all were interesting and the children of today have lost something with the passing of the blacksmith shop.

The ragmen were still passing through in 1900. They each had a large cart with a closed-in body with little doors all over it. It was painted dull red and on the outside, hanging from hooks, were shiny new tin pans. The idea was that the housewife saved her rags until the man came. He sorted them into wool and cotton rags, weighed them and told her how much money she had coming to her. Then the fun began. She walked all around the wagon, deciding which pans or kettles she would or could buy with that much money. Suppose she had 95 cents coming to her. If she chose a pan that cost 75 cents, then she had only 20 cents left, and probably could not find anything for that price. Of course, if she found a second item for 25 cents she might pay the 5 cents extra in cash but that did not seem quite according to Hoyle, so she would run into the house to look for something else that could be sold as rags to make up the difference. When it came to trading, there was not much difference between the Yankee trader and the Yankee housewife.

The ladder-man also came through frequently in a horse-drawn "truck." He sold ladders, stepladders and folding lawn seats.

Another character who has passed on is the scissors grinder. He walked through town with a contraption on his back that had a treadle and a small grindstone. He would sharpen scissors and household knives. The last one to go through was Agostine B. Dondero, a very fine Italian gentleman whose best girl jilted him when he was half way through college in Italy. He gave up everything and came here and took to the road. Few people knew it, but he was a connoisseur of Italian art and played the piano very well, indeed. When he died he left a goodly sum of money.

Two or three daguerreotype salons would be drawn into town by oxen, stay three months or so, and then be taken away to the next town.

Many of the farmers kept a yoke of oxen. They were used for the heavy work, especially logging. When a big snowstorm came, the farmers would all start their oxen toward the Post Office. The one coming in first would get five dollars and they would all get cheese, crackers and cider.

The oxen had to be shod, but not many men knew how. Elbridge Bickford, who had the blacksmith shop opposite the Post Office, had the special equipment and knowledge for shoeing oxen. First the ox was driven into a kind of stall called a cage and his head was fastened in a stanchion. He was lifted off his two front feet which were then strapped down to a paddle block. A sling made of sole leather came down underneath him and he was raised off the floor by a pulley. The oxen bellowed considerably during the process, presumably because they were frightened.

The willow industry which had been prominent in the town from about 1850 was just disappearing at the end of the 19th century. The Fleming brothers maintained a large basket factory on the old Fleming place on Maple Street, where they carried on every branch of the work. Having extensive land, they planted and grew the raw material into which they made various products,

including baskets and baby carriages for the wholesale trade. The work was all done by hand and they were very successful. Then the chip and split baskets became the vogue and the willow work diminished and finally disappeared.

At the turn of the century Charles H. Clark had big icehouses at Farm Pond near where people now put in their boats. In the winter when the ice was about fifteen inches thick, it was cut and put into the houses with sawdust between the cakes and also sawdust filling the space between the double walls of the building. Mr. Clark was very fussy about his ice and did not want any snow on it. He wanted it just the right thickness, too. When there had been a cold spell people would ask "Do we begin to cut?" But he would want to wait until it was a little bit thicker. Then a thaw would come and everyone would say that there would be no ice to cut that year. It gave people something to talk about all winter.

At first most of the work was done by hand. Big saws were used to cut the ice. First they would cut a long, narrow channel running straight out from the house, then they made cuts at right angles. Finally, it was cut into pieces that could be handled. The ice blocks were floated down the long channel to the icehouse and pulled up by horse-drawn ropes into the house. Later an engine was used for power. The ice was very clear and clean and for years practically everyone in town used it. "Goulding Street" ice was also sent into Boston.

Few people realize that Sherborn had its own telephone central for about ten years. The telephone company does not have records and the best that personal memories can do is to say that the telephone office came to Sherborn about 1902. It was at the home of Celia Holbrook, later Mrs. Albert Barber. The switchboard hung on the wall of the kitchen and looked much like a child's desk and blackboard combination. There were many so-called "farmer's lines" then, on which you had to ring two long and three short or one long and six short. Sometimes, when the Holbrook girls got to giggling, these rings were not too intelligible. But, on the whole, the girls were very faithful and diligent workers. And at least you had the satisfaction of knowing whom you were scolding if you did not get the right number.

At first service was only from six in the morning until nine at night. Later they put in another switchboard upstairs so as to have twenty-four hour service. When Celia was married in 1907, her husband did not want her tied down to the telephone, so it was taken over by Rev. C. B. Blanchard, 15 Farm Road. Later a family named Behrens took it for a short time, but the telephone company finally consolidated it with Natick.

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As wars go, the Spanish-American War was a small one. Not many men were involved and it did not last long but Sherborn did not come out of it entirely unscathed. Robert H. Dowse, son of Charles D. and Emily Adams Dowse, enlisted in the 2nd Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteers, and was made Corporal of Company C. He had seen action at the front and was returning when he was taken sick and died at Montauk Point, Long Island. More men died of sickness in this war than of bullet wounds. Robert is buried

in the cemetery on North Main Street next to the house where he grew up. Other men who fought in this war have moved into town and died here, but he is the only one who went to the war from here and died in the service.

A note about this cemetery might not be amiss here, although it goes back to an earlier date. The land was bought up by a group of men who called themselves the "Friendly Society." They drew up an agreement saying that they would visit each other when sick, and attend each other's funerals. A row of lots was laid out to start with and they planned to draw lots to see who would have which lots when someone realized that the Minister was one of the proprietors, and it would not look quite right for a minister to take part in a lottery. So the Minister was allowed to choose his plot, after which the lots were drawn as planned.

Since this book was started, many people have asked "What about the Ku Klux Klan? Weren't they active in Sherborn at one time and what is the story?" About all we can say about this is that there were indeed Klan meetings held here shortly after the turn of the century. They were held out-of-doors and were definitely anti-Catholic rather than anti-Negro. There was a very small group of fanatics who made speeches and ranted and waved their arms in a manner that a large group thought was very funny, and so they egged the others on to keep them going. A few very timid souls were frightened. Cold weather took away the ardor of the others so it really did not amount to anything.

For about ten years following 1900 there was an Episcopal Church on Whitney Street in West Sherborn. Services were held every Sunday morning and were attended by families from Western Avenue, Maple Street and from across the line in Ashland. Later Mr. Garvin bought the building and remodeled it into a house. It has been a house ever since then.

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At the turn of the century there were no black roads at all. The streets were dusty in summer and muddy or icy in winter. In the spring, when the frost was coming out of the ground, they were especially muddy. There was a place south of where Mr. Tougas now lives (83 North Main Street) where wagons were often mired. Many people from North Sherborn coming to vote on Town Meeting day never got beyond this point, because they had to get back to work at Dennison's at 1 o'clock. For the benefit of the newer residents, it may be said here that Sherborn, then, went almost to Dennison's, Beaver Brook being the boundary.

Right after Thanksgiving, wheels were taken off the wagons and replaced with runners and when cars did come (first one was registered in 1906), they were jacked up for the winter and not taken out until spring. Snow was packed down, not plowed as now. They did not want bare ground. Loads pulled much more easily on runners than on wheels. That was the time to get out firewood, as heavy logs could be moved so readily. A young man who owned a good looking sleigh and a fast horse was as popular as he would be today with a sports car.

Train service was very good. Trains ran about once an hour to Framing-



ham, starting about 6:30 a.m. This was used by people going to work in the straw shop in Medfield. The 7:30 train was taken by those who worked in the Dennison factory or in Boston. On Thursdays this train was always late because the Paymaster was on it and it took extra time to pay the railroad employees along the way. The few teachers who did not live in town came over on the 8:40. There was no train at 9:30 but at 10:30 the housewives who wanted to do some shopping in Framingham (but who would not leave until they had washed their dishes) went over and came back at 12:30.

At 1:30 was the afternoon shoppers' train—returning at 3:30. The next one over was at 5:30 which gave a chance for a bit of late shopping and then everybody who had gone to work at 7:30 in the morning came back at 6:30. It was possible to go over again at 7:30 to go to the theatre or to get a drink and come back at 9:30.

The last train went to Framingham just before midnight. When there was a dance in town the orchestra would have to make this train. So, as the last strains of "Home Sweet Home" were fading, the orchestra players were grabbing their instruments in one hand, their overcoats in the other, and starting their dash for the train. The conductor generally knew they were coming and would wait a bit for them if necessary.

Single tickets cost 10 cents but a ten-ride ticket could be had for 70 cents. These ten-ride tickets could be bought only in Sherborn. The teachers who came from out of town, therefore, had to buy a single ticket at the Framingham end the first day. Once here, they could buy the ten-ride ticket throughout the year. This left them with one ticket in June for the first day the following fall—if they could find it then. There was a lot of joking about that extra ticket.

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Back in the days when the majority of voters were farmers who were not too busy the first of March, and no women voted, Town Meeting was held in the daytime. Voting booths were set up around the sides of the Town Hall where the ballots could be marked at any time, and the articles of the Warrant were taken up, generally starting about nine o'clock in the morning. Ordinarily, the entire Warrant could be disposed of during the day but the polls were left open awhile for late voters.

Dinner at noontime was a problem, for once a group gets dispersed, it is always hard to get them back together again. So, for quite a few years, the Women's Alliance of the Unitarian Church put on a dinner at Unity Hall. The meal would be planned for twelve o'clock, and when it was about ready, a woman would go up to the Town Hall, get the Moderator's eye and nod, meaning that dinner was ready when the men were. If a routine article was in progress, the Moderator would suggest that dinner being ready, they adjourn as soon as they finished this article. The woman would then go back and start dishing up the food. However, if a controversial article were being argued, more time would be needed. In any case, the women knew just when to expect their customers.

Dinner usually consisted of meat, vegetables, apple pie, cheese and coffee, a typical Church Supper.

For years Sherborn was a divided town. North Sherborn, in sight of the Dennison factory, consisted of one-tenth of the area of the town but contained almost one-half of the voters. These people lived so near together that each man's well was close to the next man's cesspool. Half of the school children in town were housed in two small wooden buildings. There were so many nationalities that it was a regular League of Nations. These people boasted that, with the rate of increase in the population of that area, in five years they would move the Town Hall over there, and there was real danger of their doing it.

It also included a Red Light district, complete with kitchen barrooms. It was a nuisance to Sherborn and a thorn in the side of Framingham. The Framingham Chief of Police was named a special officer in Sherborn, but it did not help. Town water finally settled the issue.

A few people in the center of town wanted town water. A survey was made which resulted in two proposals: either they purchase water from Natick or get water from wells to be drilled in town. However, the houses were too far apart to make the matter economically feasible, and it was finally given up.

The North Sherborn residents also wanted town water, and although they had no intention of spending enough money to put it into the center of town, there was a tie-up for a time between the Water Faction and the Northenders. Then someone approached Framingham and arranged a plan.

This plan proposed that the land down to about where Sunshine Dairy now stands was to go to Framingham, which town guaranteed that within one year they would put in one mile of water pipe, one mile of sewer pipe and would build a brick school house. It finally went through but not without a fight.

Town meetings were held in Sherborn and Framingham. A bill was put through the Legislature and this bill finally came back to the towns for a referendum vote. The Selectmen of Sherborn were opposed to the annexation of the north end of the town to Framingham. So they set the day of the referendum vote on a Saturday, knowing that the Jewish people of North Sherborn were in favor, and thinking that they would not vote on a Saturday. However, they were not quite smart enough. Sabbath is from sunset to sunset, and the Jews, with their Rabbi, congregated on the east side of the Leland Street School where the voting was taking place, and just before the polls closed, the Rabbi said: "Gentlemen, I do not see the sun, I think it has set, let us go in." They went in and voted for the annexation, which was passed.

The question has sometimes arisen as to when and why the east end of the town became the "Gold Coast." Up to about the turn of the century, people were taxed on securities the same as on real estate. If you were worth a half million and lived in Boston you paid much more tax on your securities than if you lived in Dover or Sherborn. Some people simply forgot some of their holdings when making up a tax list, but the government had started looking up old records of estates and began to question what became of the money that Great Uncle So-and-So left you. So people moved out to Dover and then Sherborn, living here in the summer, and staying overnight the first







SHERBORN  
IN 1900.

of January so as to be taxed here. In one year Dover gained enough extra tax revenue to build a new school house.

Back when the Chairman of the Selectmen was also Chairman of the Board of Registrars, Chairman of the Board of Health, Chief of the Fire Department and Chief of Police, his duties were varied. One day he would be refusing a permit to blast to a man who wanted to start a quarry in a thickly settled neighborhood, the next he might be dashing to Boston to the State Board of Health to get antitoxin for a sick child. Then there were the fights, like the one when two men quarrelled over which one had the smartest children. They used their voices first, then their fists, and when this seemed to be inadequate, like knights of old mounting their chargers, they mounted their bicycles and rode fiercely toward each other. The grass was soft and they were drunk enough to be perfectly relaxed so they just rolled off the bikes, and then got up and started over again, keeping it up as long as the bikes lasted. Finally the Chairman of the Selectmen in his role of Chief of Police sent them home. Fortunately their homes lay in opposite directions. The bikes were a total loss.

### SCHOOLS AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

As always, the education and upbringing of the children was very important not only to parents but to voters who had no children. Ten years before the turn of the century there had been little schools in many parts of the town. These schools were ungraded, but an extra grade (five in all) was put into high school as a review year so that pupils might be more evenly prepared for algebra and Latin. There were two schoolhouses in North Sherborn which were kept until this district was annexed to Framingham—one, now an apartment house, on Beaver Street, and the other on Leland Street where the Brick school building now stands.

As for the rest of the town, the Plain District School was on North Main Street just in front of where it now stands—the home of Allen Edson. The West School was on the west side of Western Avenue about opposite the end of Pleasant Street. This building was moved over to Daniel Whitney's farm (a little to the south) and was burned in the fire there years later. The Southwest School stood about where Mill Street and Nason Hill Road join, and the South School was on the west side of Main Street between the ends of Snow Street and Bullard Street. The Farm School was on Farm Road west of Lake Street. This is the land that Mr. Channing offered to give to the town at one time for school purposes. As a rule, the teachers of these district schools were local girls—occasionally boys—who wanted to live at home and earn a little money. They had no special training in educational theories. The district schools were discontinued in the mid-1890's, and soon after this, the children were arranged in grades. Up to now, a child advanced as fast as he could. This was not too hard for the teacher as the schools were very small and a teacher relied on her own ingenuity rather than on some rule laid down by a prominent educator.

There was a wooden school building near where the present Center School now stands which had two rooms, and since the Academy did not need all its room there was plenty of space to bring all of the pupils into the center of

town without building anything new. Trained teachers could be hired, and, in theory, everything was all right; but parents then as now dreaded change for their children. They argued that if a child is taken sick at school in sight of home she could run home and her mother could care for her; but if she is 'way downtown she would have to wait until the bus comes in the afternoon. May I say in passing that "bus" was not a verb in those days, but a noun. We did not "bus" the child: we gave him a ride on the bus, and frequently they were called "barges." There were other complications such as the driver whose mind was not quite clear—but he could drive a horse. He would put three or four horse-blankets over his own legs and let the children shiver. Also there was the man who wanted to get at his farm-work early, so he took the children to school before eight when the rest of them did not arrive until nine. Of course all the busses were horse-drawn for a long time: the first automobile busses were introduced in 1915; but horses were still used after that.

Of course the buildings did not have any modern conveniences. As late as 1900 there were still candles in the Academy building with ink on the bottom of them—they had been placed in the inkwell for light when a pupil was kept after school until dark. Latin and Greek were both taught before and after the turn of the century and almost any subject that a pupil wanted and the teacher knew. Friday afternoons were given to debates and "Rhetoricals," at which time the pupils were taught to think on their feet, to conduct a meeting and to write a good secretary's report. Athletics did not amount to much: there were classes in free exercises, also working with Indian clubs, dumb-bells, etc. In warm weather they occasionally had a hare-and-hound race or an outdoor meet, but not in competition with other schools. With only two teachers for the high school it would seem as if the school standing must be very low, but it must be remembered that many schools in larger towns were not much better off. The graduates of Sawin Academy did quite well for themselves.



## CHAPTER II

## The People

It is hard to project oneself back into an earlier period of history when living conditions, international relations, etc. were so different that we cannot think just as they did then, so that many opinions and thoughts seem strange to us now. However, there are always a few people whose sayings are a little at odds with the rest of the world, so that even in their own time they stand out in the crowd. We are putting in a few thumb-nail sketches of some of these to add a little spice.

NASON BULLARD—A town character. His most famous wisecrack was: "In this old world of ours there's no loss without some gains; the day my old man died, our cat, Sadie, had a litter of kittens."

MARTIN COZZENS—A real old Yankee on a broken-down farm on Nason Hill Road. The School Committee suddenly found themselves without a driver of the school barge which took the children to and from the Center School. The thought occurred to them that Mart might be persuaded to take over. Two of the committee called on him and gave him their best sales talk. When finished they asked for his decision. Said Mart: "You say I'll have to git 'em at 9 o'clock and git 'em again at 3 o'clock to come home? Nope . . . too much anxiety."

ELBRIDGE BICKFORD—A meek, little man married to a woman who wore the pants and who was a fussy housekeeper. She wouldn't allow him to enter the house until his shoes were clean, so in winter when he came in he would thoroughly stamp the snow off his feet before entering. After years and years of this the habit was so formed that even in summer when the mercury was in the 90's he never entered the Post Office or the Country Store, for example, without first "stamping the snow off his shoes."

CHARLES D. LEWIS—This man was well-to-do and so was his father. Each had a gentleman's farm. Both liked cattle and both liked to attend auctions when cattle were to be sold. Both frequently and intentionally bid against each other when a particularly appealing cow was up for sale. The bidding would go on until the figure was, perhaps, 50% above the actual value of the cow when the father would stop bidding and the auctioneer would say: "Sold to Charles D. Lewis." Whereupon the father, who always stood a generous distance from his son, would turn to whomever might be at his side and say to him: "Well, I made Charlie pay a pretty penny for that critter."

RUFE HOLBROOK—In exaggerating he had no equal in town. Living near Little Pond he had the negro Green family as neighbors. Once when asked if there were any big turtles in Little Pond Rufe replied: "Why, they are so big that when you see a couple of big black heads out there in the water



you have to look twice to tell whether they belong to turtles or a couple of Greens in swimming." His son Bert ran a close second in tall tales, and they both claimed they raised roosters so big that they stood up and ate corn from the top of a barrel and that two could pull a plow. Rufe always maintained that he once had a horse so fast that when a sudden shower came up as he and Bert were heading home only the back of the carriage was wet on arrival home—the horse still perfectly dry.

**CHARLES A. CLARK**—A storekeeper for years, a good judge of men with a wide knowledge of the town's people. When asked about how good a certain worker was, he replied: "He's a damned good man so long as you don't pay him, but when you do . . ."

**FRANKLIN GROUT**—A fine gentleman of the old school with a sentimental feeling of the past and with little urge to change in the future. When in Town Meeting the discussion centered on laying a new floor in the Hall, Mr. Grout arose and said: "My father trod this floor for years and what was good enough for him should be good enough for us. I move the article be tabled."

**ED LELAND**—Known as "Little Ed." In his early days he worked for and boarded with Joe Waite Barber, a very religious man. When asked how well Barber fed him, Little Ed replied: "Joe is very religious and says Grace before every meal, but I told him what we needed was less praying and much more meat." As an example of how close Little Ed stayed to his home in later days, once a week on a Saturday night, he came to the village store to buy his groceries for the week. Came Saturday again and Ed arrived only to find that the store had burned down six days before. It was news to Ed.

**FRANKIE PACKARD**—When around ten years of age he was hounded by his mother to brush his teeth regularly. At Christmas he was given 25 cents to buy a present for his three-months-old sister. What did he buy her? A toothbrush!

**JOEL STRATTON**—When a certain Boston business man bought a place in Sherborn he became enthused with the idea of buying an axe and, on week-ends, going into his woods to chop wood. Of course, he bragged about it to his associates in Boston, also to some of his neighbors. After a period Joe decided to accompany the owner and look over the cutting, expecting to see some stacked cordwood. He was shocked to see piles of almost entirely small diameter underbrush. Whereupon he said: "What the heck has been in here—woodpeckers?"

More about Joel Stratton—he had a big peach orchard on Peters Hill and was troubled by people from West Natick stealing peaches. So one Sunday morning he asked the Constable to go up to the orchard with him and apprehend some of them. The Constable at that time was Harry Crane who lived on Coolidge Street beyond the aqueduct. He had a big milk farm and peddled milk in Natick. As the two men hid in the peach orchard every now and then they would hear voices, and drawing near, Joel would say: "There are some of those people now stealing peaches. Arrest them!" But Mr. Crane would always reply: "Oh, I can't arrest him, he's one of my best customers." So

that was the end of that story. Mr. Crane was also sometimes Highway Surveyor, which at that time was an elective office. At other times Mr. Stratton held the office. If they ran against each other and Mr. Crane won, Joel would be at Mr. Crane's house the morning after town meeting with his pair of horses asking: "Where do you want me to go to work, Harry?" There were never any hard feelings.

PRESTON MORSE—For a sudden switch, consider this. For twenty-odd years he courted a Natick girl, then blithely jilted her and married her sister!

ANDREW YOUNGWALL—Once when cutting ice for Charles H. Clark, and after imbibing a wee bit too much, he looked up at Clark and said: "You don't like the way I cut this ice." No answer. Again: "You don't like the way I cut this ice, I get through." Still no answer from Clark. Finally: "You don't like the way I cut this ice, I get through. By God, I *am* through!" and he walked off the job.

BILL BARROWS—A lanky Civil War mule driver. He always had a horse and wagon but his horses were always hopeless in quality. To give an idea, one he had was obtained in a trade for a harness. In riding with him, with the horse hardly able to go faster than a walk, one might say: "Your horse isn't very fast, Billy," to which he would reply: "The horse is all right but damn these 25 cent whips." For many summers he worked on a large truck farm lot next to the cemetery entrance. He would lean on his hoe and watch the procession enter, and when it left, leaning on the same hoe, he would invariably remark: "Well, they dropped George (or Tom or Joe) like a hot potato and ran."

WALTER LEACH—Mrs. Leach was a very religious woman, a quality not shared by her husband. When Rev. Mary Macomber was Pastor of Pilgrim Church, she often held mid-week prayer meetings at houses and Mrs. Leach liked to go and expected her husband to go and take her. He once said: "The only thing that makes those prayer meetings worth going to is to sit beside Mr. . . . He doesn't like to go either and he always takes a good fortifier before he starts. Well, if I can sit next to him, getting a whiff of his breath is almost as good as having a hooker myself." Another time: "If you give my wife a map she can show you where every town in the Bible is, but around here, heck, she doesn't know where Sudbury is."

JOSEPH WILLIAM COOMBS—Or "Old Bill Coombs" as he preferred to be called, lived with his wife, Mary, in the house now 44 South Main Street. Their only child had died in babyhood. Mr. Coombs worked as a carpenter. Often in the winter when there was very little work, he would braid rugs or knit mittens and gloves. He probably never earned more than a dollar a day, but they were thrifty people and when he died he left a small fortune for those days. He had been Town Clerk and Selectman and was respected by his fellow citizens. He had very decided likes and dislikes which extended to his relatives. He had a lot of fun making his will, giving a hundred dollars to this one and twenty-five to that one, usually with a good reason behind each gift. He repeatedly said that after his funeral he wanted the relatives to assemble in his sitting-room and hear the will read before they went home.

He always added that his only regret was that he could not be there to see the expressions on their faces when they found out how much they were to get. Someone who was there also wished that he might have seen the expressions on their faces when they learned that the rest of the estate went to the Children's Hospital in Boston. He wanted the money that would have gone to his son to be used to save the life of someone else's son.

EDGAR J. SMITH—If you had lived in Sherborn around the turn of the century, especially if you had been a small child at the time, you would probably have had your photograph taken by Edgar Smith. He had a bamboo chair and a white fur rug and with those two props, he photographed two or three generations of babies. He was a tall man with a high domed head, bald on top but with a fringe of hair around the edge, a full beard, twinkling eyes, and the slowest motion imaginable. He would set out the chair and throw the rug over it, put the baby on the rug and tuck it up around him, then focus the camera. When he got it the way he wanted it, he would go into the dark-room and get the loaded plate holder, take one last look into the ground glass, find the baby had moved and start all over again. At the end of an hour when perhaps four pictures had been taken, the mother's nerves would be completely frazzled, the baby tired out, but Edgar was as slow and gay as ever. A few days later the proofs would come and . . . *mirabile dictu* . . . every one was photographically perfect. His pictures were not artistic, but, like passport pictures, were absolute likenesses. The pictures were developed and finished so that they seldom faded and they were meticulously trimmed and mounted. His work with amateur films was something you do not get today. He would cut the negatives apart before developing them, then put each in, one at a time. If the picture lacked contrast, he would add a few drops of this or that chemical to bring out the highlights, or whatever he thought it needed. In addition to his photography, he was quite a naturalist. He could give you the name of about any tree, bird, flower or insect in the town of Sherborn, and could give both the common and the Latin names. His collection of insects was given to the Peabody Museum in Salem, along with some of his stuffed animals. His home was on Everett Street.

## CHAPTER III

## Explorers, Adventurers and Others

Back in the last century Sherborn sent several men to foreign parts, quite distant countries that were then only partly explored, and as some of these were still living at the turn of the century it seems proper to include them here.

A. L. BABCOCK was in South America collecting and stuffing birds in 1859. He also did many paintings of the birds in the style of Audubon's work and on the same kind of paper. He brought back many birds which he stuffed and mounted and had quite a museum in the north side of his house at 123 North Main Street. Included in this exhibit was an enormous snake. Some of this collection was given to Sawin Academy, but many of the teachers were disinterested and they became moth-eaten. Others were given to the South Natick Historical Society where they may still be seen, including the now-extinct Passenger Pigeon; but the bulk of them were given to Wellesley College because they had a better place to keep and exhibit them. However, these were all burned when College Hall burned down some fifty years ago. Mr. Babcock died in 1903.

GEORGE SANGER went to Australia where he lived for many years, finally coming home and keeping store at the center of the town. He brought a wife with him. She never quite fitted into Sherborn society or got along with his Sherborn relatives and after George died, his wife went back to relatives in Australia. She took with her several trunksfull of petticoats, etc., of the Gibson Girl era, which she had brought from Australia as a bride. We get this from the relative who packed her trunks.

ALBERT MORSE obtained his formal schooling in the Town of Sherborn, and taught for many years at Wellesley College. He also had charge of the Nature Exhibits at the Peabody Museum in Salem where he organized Nature Clubs for children. He worked closely with Edgar J. Smith, the Sherborn photographer, in making collections of birds, insects and small mammals of this part of the country for the Salem Museum.

We have left ALBERT HAWES until the last because we know more about him and his travels than the others. He lived quite a long time after he came home, but due to a fall from a tree, he was an invalid the last of his life.

In 1873, just two years after the historic meeting of the great explorers, Stanley and Livingston, Alfred Hawes and Frank Salisbury, young men in their early twenties, left Sherborn and went to Africa. They went first to South Africa and after a little while made Kimberly their headquarters. Frank Salisbury went into the interior on several trips, and what became of him, nobody ever knew, but Alfred Hawes came back to tell the story. He tried mining, but, having been intrigued by many "tall tales" of life in the interior, he pushed



on, studying nature and trading with the natives, even going into places where they had never seen a white man before. What did they trade? Well, of course, gold and diamonds were the glittering lure that beckoned them on, but actually ivory was the big money-making trade object. The natives even used ivory for fence posts and were glad to get rid of it for small articles. On one occasion when Sir Randolph Churchill, father of the famous Sir Winston, came to Africa, Mr. Hawes and his brother-in-law, Mr. Tidmarsh, were scientists assigned to the Churchill party to assist in caring for and mounting skins. In 1893, Mr. Hawes came home bringing with him his wife and young sons as well as several tons of mounted specimens and hundreds of photographs, both lantern slides and finished pictures. For several years he lectured until a fall injured his health so that he had to give it up. A brochure published at the time says of him: "Few people are better qualified to speak on the subject of South Africa than Alfred Hawes." He travelled all the way from Cape Town to King Solomon's mines on the edge of the Sahara. Many of his specimens are today in the Peabody Museum in Salem and at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard. Among the articles in Salem is a magnet that belonged to Dr. David Livingston.

*Other People of More than Passing Interest*

HENRY HUDSON KITSON - THEO RUGGLES KITSON

Even though they did not come to town until 1916, a book of anywhere near this era would not be complete without mention of Mr. and Mrs. Kitson, both very famous sculptors. The studio in Sherborn was definitely Mrs. Kitson's as she was at the time working on some heroic-sized figures for a Southern War Memorial and needed a great deal of room. Perhaps her most famous and best known statue in this vicinity is the Kosciusko statue on the Boylston Street side of the Public Garden in Boston. There is also the Equestrian Victory in Hingham and Doughboy Statue in Hopkinton. She had studied in Paris and had exhibited at the World's Fair in Paris in 1889 and at many Fairs and Art Exhibits since then, and was awarded many medals and prizes. While Mr. Kitson's principal studio was in Tyringham, he spent much time here with his family. Husband and wife collaborated in many of their works. He had studied in Paris and exhibited at the Paris World's Fair in 1889 and received many awards in different countries, including a decoration from the King of Rumania in 1889. Among his best works that are in this part of the country and may be seen by interested people from Sherborn are The Minuteman (sometimes called the Captain Parker Statue) in Lexington, The Pilgrim Maiden in Brewster Gardens, Plymouth, Music of the Sea in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Sir Richard Saltonstall Memorial at Watertown. The house where they lived is no longer standing, but it stood where it would be numbered 100 Western Avenue.

THE REVEREND EDMUND DOWSE and his daughter DEBORAH

Much has been written about the Reverend Edmund Dowse. After graduation from Amherst College in 1838, he came back to his home town and Church and became the Pastor of the Pilgrim Church, which office he held until his death in 1905. He was known as a "marrying parson" and people



came from miles around to be married by him. There were big celebrations at his 25th, 50th and 60th anniversaries, with special speakers, music, refreshments and decorations, but these have been written up in several books before this. About his daughter, Deborah, not so much has been told and she surely was a power in the Town and Church in her day. She married Deacon Lowell Coolidge and had one child, but the Deacon died and she went back to her father's house (25 Farm Road) where she was the Parsonage's official hostess for many years. Here she entertained the great and near-great, including a Vice-President of the United States. She was a woman of very strong beliefs and convictions. One story about her will illustrate this. Mrs. Coolidge did not approve of dancing. One June evening in the 1890's the graduation exercises of the Sawin Academy were over fairly early and just going home seemed stupid to the young people. Why not stay and dance awhile? Suiting action to the thought some of them started to move settees back while others rounded up some girls who could take turns playing the piano. It wasn't until the music began that Mrs. Coolidge realized what was going on. "There will be no dancing," she announced. She felt that a graduation was a scholastic occasion and held no place for merriment and reveling. Eleanor Paul, who had been prevailed upon to play to start with, was at the piano when Mrs. Coolidge descended upon her and told her to stop. Eleanor kept on playing, but Mrs. Coolidge stood behind her with her arms around her and grasped her hands and held them up too high to reach the keys. Eleanor soon gave in. It was no use to fight Mrs. Coolidge once she had made up her mind.

She was an untiring Church worker. If she saw children not in Sunday School because they did not have good clothing, she obtained it for them. If a young girl wished to go to evening services at the Church, but lived too far away to walk home alone, Mrs. Coolidge would entertain her in her own home for the night. She was the Salvation Army, S.P.C.C. and a few other things rolled into one. A one-woman social agency for the Town. A truly remarkable woman.

## JOHN BURKE

One of the most colorful people who lived in Town at the turn of the century was John (better known as "Jack") Burke; a tall, red-haired man with a great sense of humor and the ability to do what had to be done. One story will illustrate his abilities. There was a Town Meeting at a time when the Town was very closely divided on the question of Town Water. The man who had been elected Moderator was strongly prejudiced for town water, but unfortunately for that side, they did not have a majority present at the meeting. They were relying on the Moderator's ruling in their direction which he simply could not do. After about half of the warrant had been taken up and his friends were getting wrathful at him, he threw down his gavel and shouted: "I resign!" and walked out of the meeting. Everybody thought that automatically dissolved the meeting, but the Town Clerk knew his Parliamentary Law, jumped up quickly and called for nominations for another Clerk of the Meeting. John Burke was nominated and duly elected. On his way to the rostrum he was heard to say: "I don't know a helluva lot about Parliamentary Law, but I will finish this meeting." And finish it he did. They breezed through the rest of the articles, of which there were many, with the Moderator

and the majority on the same side. There was no need of resorting to roll call and other time-consuming practices and finally the warrant was finished. No one even suggested adjourning the meeting as that would give the other side a chance to recruit more voters and perhaps reconsider some of the votes. At last everything was decided, the meeting finished and dissolved and the voters went home. It was then four o'clock in the morning and the farmers started milking without going to bed at all.

A more tragic story also refers to the Burke family. As it is the only murder in town in recent times, we will include it. Mr. Burke and his family had moved to Andover, leaving the oldest son, Harold, living alone in the home here. He was to be married soon and intended to live here after his marriage, so even if it was lonely, he stayed. Sundays he went to Andover, and on one of these trips he took in a hitch-hiker, a young man who was alone in the world. Although his family advised against it, Harold took the young man in as company and to help with the work. Harold had a rendering business. He took old horses, sold the skins for baseballs, the bones for fertilizer, etc. He had a pistol to use in case the horse was still alive when it was brought to him. The young man was fascinated with the pistol and good-natured Harold showed him how it worked. One morning the boy woke up first, went down and got the pistol and fired it on Harold. When he didn't move, he went down and shot holes in the tea kettle. That was more fun as the water ran all over everything. Then he took the car and started driving. He stopped at a filling station in Medfield where his peculiar behavior aroused the curiosity of the attendant. The attendant held him and called the police, to whom the young man immediately confessed the whole story. He was a mental defective who had been let out of an institution just a short time before. Harold had been a big, good-natured fellow liked by everybody and his death was a shock to everyone in town.

## POETIC TRIBUTE TO OLD SHERBORN FROM CHICAGO

H. Waldo Howe, of Chicago, who visited his native town one summer after many years' absence, wrote as follows, and enclosed in his letter a poetic tribute to the old town:

"The man was right when he said there are no friends like old friends. He can make many new friends, some can make them faster than others, but twenty-five friends of long ago are more valuable than a thousand new ones. I am glad to see so many of your Sherborn boys still there and doing such noble work to keep the old town up to the high standard and even a little better. It had been told me Sherborn was dead. It's the liveliest graveyard I ever visited. I once heard a man say: 'I wish I was a millionaire who'd religion.' I wish I was a millionaire and lived in Sherborn and I am enclosing my reasons why we all love Sherborn.

## OLD SHERBORN TOWN

The roses nowhere bloom so white as in Sherborn,  
The sun shines nowhere quite so bright as in Sherborn,  
And nowhere hearts so lightly beat,  
For Heaven and earth seem to meet  
Down in Sherborn.

I love all things the season brings in Sherborn,  
All buds that start, all birds that sing in Sherborn,  
And if ever again I can see my way,  
Shall certainly make my final stay  
Down in dear old Sherborn.

The days are never quite so long as in Sherborn,  
Nor quite so filled with happy song as in Sherborn,  
And when my time shall come to die,  
Just take me back and let me lie,  
Amidst the rocks on Pine Hill down in old Sherborn.

There is nowhere a land so fair as in Sherborn,  
So full of song, so free of care as in Sherborn,  
And I believe that happy land  
The Lord prepared for mortal man  
Is built exactly on the plan of old Sherborn."

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